

LIMINAL CONNECTIONS

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Experimental short film +/- 10 min

Introduction

Working as a webcam model you form intense connections online, it's not only 'sex-work'; it's emotional work.

Set in a web-cam studio this short documentary will explore the way digital and physical space inform each other and how sexuality and intimacy is experienced within this digital space. It is set in the decor of projected fantasy, a fantasy that sometimes is in stark contrast with the blunt, almost banal, reality.

In this short experimental documentary we will visit several rooms and spaces set in a webcam studio in Bucharest, the web-cam capital of the world. A webcam studio is a place where people work from who are in the webcam-industry. Performers broadcast their shows from different 'themed' rooms, set-up in a studio-like way with lights, a camera and a computer.

Sex-work like camming is next to body work mostly emotional work¹. Many of the models say that the biggest part of camming is forming connection and friendships with the clients that come into a chatroom. What is different from just regular porn is that these viewers want to be heard, they want to connect on a different level with the performers and create an intimate relationship.

*"They're defining a new kind of intimacy, It's not traditional sex work, not a relationship, but something in between."*²

Camming is done from home or a webcam-studio, a place, but the internet juxtaposes these "spaces" and "places", and creates a natural environment for liminality; a place separate from one's space where the ordinary norms of everyday life easily may be suspended. In this liminal space there is room for new forms of connection to arise.

How does the online world of web-camming influence these physical spaces and vice versa? What desires and fantasies arise from this liminal space? What freedom do the clients and workers have within this performed reality?

The documentary

This short documentary will try and answer some of these questions through interviews with webcam models. It will explore the different forms of connection that is created within the mediated landscape. Through interviews with models we will explore fantasies and intimate relationships that the webcam girls perform and create.

The story will be set in a webcam studio. Visually the studio setting will act as a metaphor for the performed reality. The camera moves through the different spaces and will play with watch 'in front' and 'behind' the web-cam. It will also focus on the different computer screens in the studio and the conversations that go on these screens.

The studio, called Best Studios', is known for their 'glamorous' image. As a studio they focus on these 'performed relationships'. They don't use sex-toys and focus as much as possible on the creating a connection between the viewer and the model. They provide English classes and train the models on how to create these forms of relationship, focussing on 'befriending' them. At the

¹ 'Always hot, always live':¹ Computer-mediated sex work in the era of 'camming'
MADELINE V. HENRY and PANTEÁ FARVID Women's Studies Journal, December 2017

² Viviana Zelizer, a Princeton sociologist and author of "The Purchase of Intimacy," about the interplay between economics and relationships.

same time they tell them to stay honest; don't say you're in love with them if you're not. Don't tell them you will meet them. The cam-studio want their models to play by certain rules, to protect the models and to protect their image. But within these set limitations, relationships and friendships arise.

A lot of the models they hire are students, woman who speak English well and have something to talk about.

We will also see the models prepare for work, literally transforming from the offline to an online mediated image. In the webcam studio there are hairdressers, make-up artist and a lot of different ways to dress. We will follow the models through this path of transformation whilst hearing their funny and interesting way of communicating with the other side of the screen.

*"This is part of the job, we are selling illusions. If they want to buy them, it's not our fault."*³

The interviews will focus on the selling of illusions as well as how sometimes these illusions slowly turn into something more meaningful. We will hear models tell about special relationships they have created online; sometimes with people they have been talking to for over 5 years on a regular basis. Sometimes these connections turn into a 'real' friendship, one where there is no money transactions involved but one that is based on mutual interests and acknowledgment.

Through these interviews we will examine what clients of these webcam models are looking for online. Sometimes this is to perform or talk about sexual fantasies they have that they can't express with their partners or maybe don't have anyone to explore them with. Others just want to talk about their relationships or loneliness.

We see how being a webcam model is so much more than performing sexual acts in front of a webcam. They are exploring the fascinating world of the liminal space where sexuality takes place, which gives them interesting, funny and useful insights into our own sexuality and search for connection.

*"After knowing the job better, I got to appreciate it. [...] I got to appreciate it because I met some nice people online, that changed my opinion about it. That showed me; it's not only a dirty job, a sexual job. It's also the opportunity, to make a [...] friendship, to open your heart, to share a part of your life, to share your feelings, to share ideas. So this why I got to appreciate it."*⁴

³ <https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/article/1865183/camgirls-how-pornography-pioneers-are-taking-control>

⁴ Interview with Jessica